

The Afghan Bulletin

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Contents

Some thoughts on the 1944 (?) Postal Stationery Envelopes	103
Another short-lived Northern Route	107

Some thoughts on the 1944 (?) Postal Stationery Envelopes

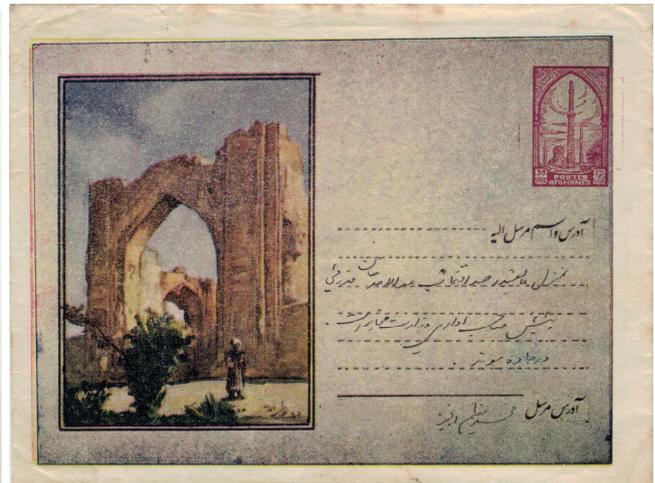
Introduction

I must start by acknowledging the help of Thomas L bbering who first brought the subject to my attention, provided many scans including those of the insert cards, and without whose valuable input this article would not have been possible. These postal stationery envelopes – PS29/30 and PS31/32 – are all hard to find, particularly the pictorial pair. Used examples are especially scarce. Maybe the lack of copies is why they have received so little attention. First, examples of the cards we are talking about (reduced in size):

PS 29/30 (they differ only in the size of the envelope)



PS 31/32



The issue date.

This is given in the Afghanistan 1934-73 Catalogue as '1944', but that date is speculative. There is no firm evidence as to when they were actually issued. The first mention of these envelopes at all is, I think, in Wilkins & Divall *Afghanistan Revisited*, but they did not give a date. The date may have come from that mentioned in the Wilkins Collection (sold by Feldman in 2014) and have been based purely on the issue date of the 35 poul stamp of the same design.

So is '1944' correct? That date is possible and makes sense as the inland letter rate was raised to 35 poul in mid-1944 and remained as such until November 1959 when it was raised to 50 poul. However:

- no examples are known used before 1954. In fact all known used copies come within the period 1954-61.
- It is interesting that Patterson in *Afghanistan: Its Twentieth Century Postal Issues* does not mention any of PS29-32 at all. He was in the country from the summer of 1946 for three and a half years – so to about the end of 1949/start of 1950. He is usually quite reliable and must surely have known about their existence had they been issued by that time.

Given this, an issue date no earlier than 1950, and possibly as late as 1954, seems more likely.

How were the pictorial envelopes produced, and by whom?

Here there are again unanswered questions. The plain PS29 and 30 had the stamp imprint applied by letterpress. But how was the pictorial design – generally referred to as a 'mottled overlay' – added to produce PS31 and 32?

Research by Thomas has led him to the conclusion that PS31 and PS32 were created from PS30 by color-copying (i.e., photocopying) *plain* envelopes with three mottled overlays, one each for the stamp, the lettering, and the picture. This is where the three different coloured 'frames' of the overall image come from and why the stamp imprint no longer appear to be by letterpress.

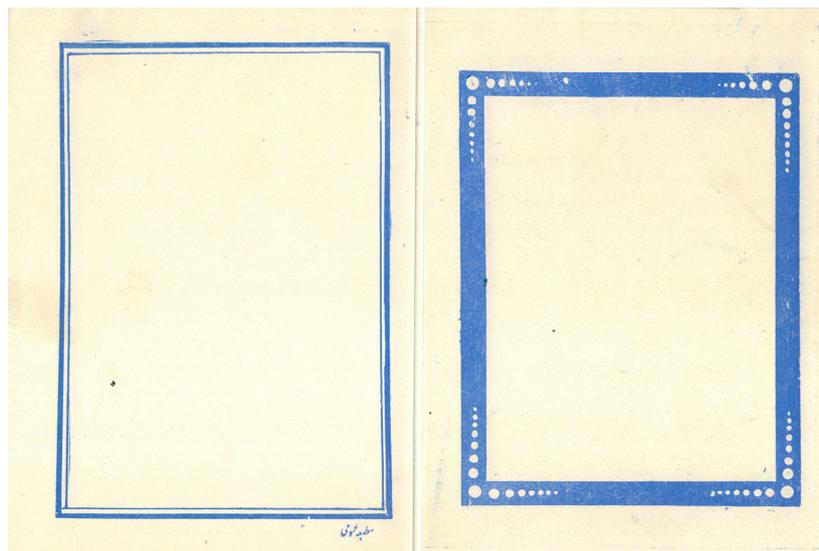
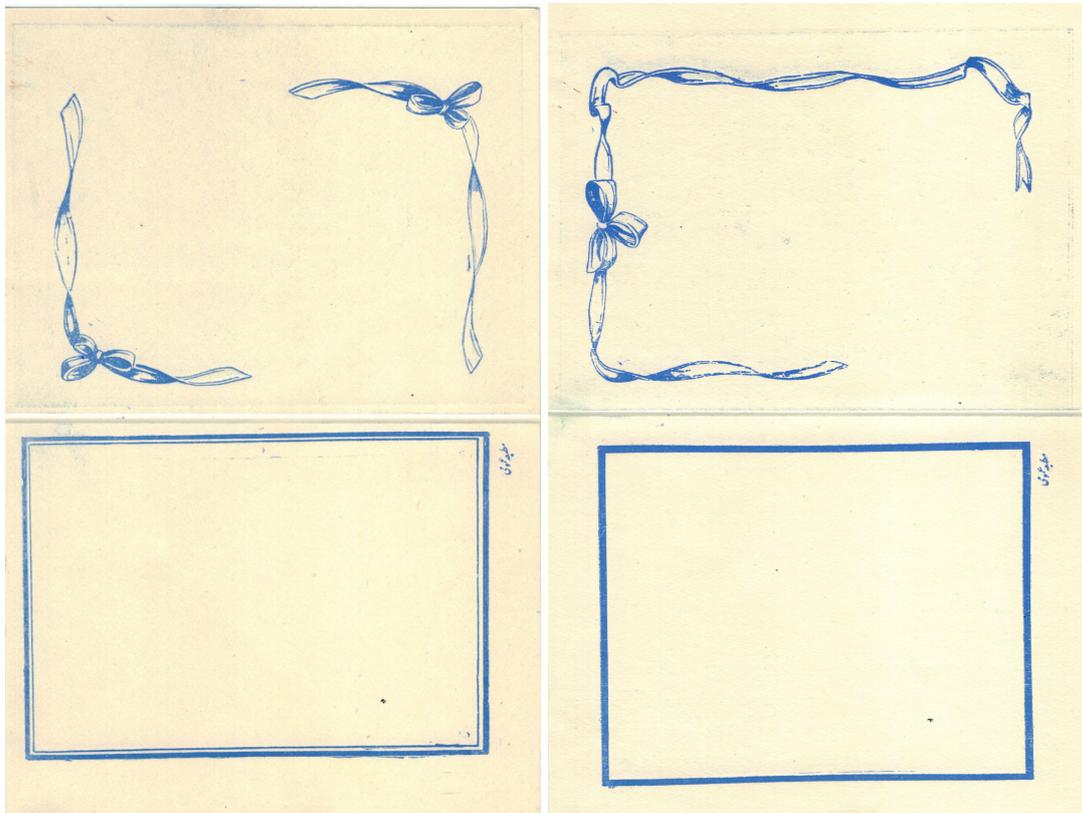
My assumption had been that examples of PS29/30 with the stamp already printed had had the picture/lettering added to create PS31/32. That however does not seem correct as the distance from the edge of the envelope to the top of the stamp is different in PS31/32 to that in PS29/30, so giving further credence to Thomas's theory.

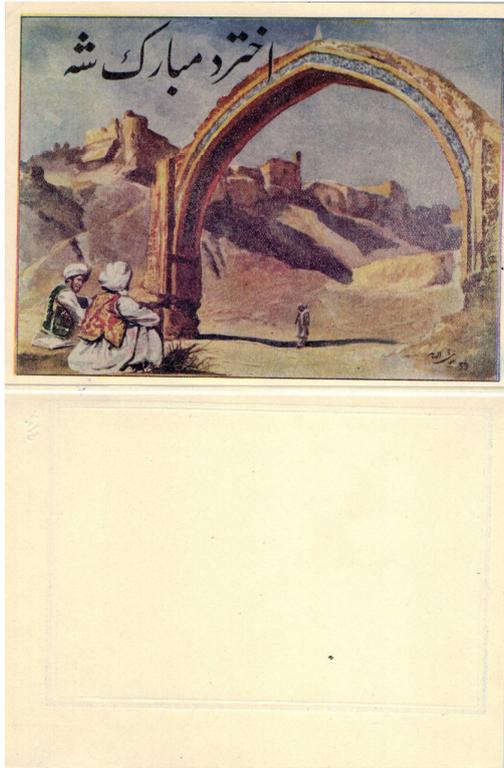
However, in all cases, the stamp imprint on PS31/32 appears to be correctly positioned, but where the picture and lettering are misaligned, they are misaligned together: so maybe there were only two operations: the picture/lettering being added in one operation and the stamp imprint in another?

Now, who produced these pictorial designs? If the issue date was 1944, then Thomas believes that the only colour copier that existed in Afghanistan at that time was located in the U.S. Embassy and that it would accordingly be reasonable to assume that PS31 and PS32 were a 'gift' from the U.S. Ambassador to the Director General of the Royal Afghan Postal Administration. If the issue date is 1950 or later, then there may well have been other copiers in the country by then and the Afghan postal authorities may have produced the envelopes themselves.

Insert cards

When Thomas contacted me about these envelopes he had another surprise for me: insert cards – something I had never seen before. These inserts were found with copies of PS29/32, but not inside them. However the pictorial insert cards are produced in the same way as PS31/32 and undoubtedly ‘belong’ to them. All were acquired in Afghanistan in the 1950s. Again, the illustrations are much reduced.





Another short-lived 'Northern Route'

The 'Northern Route' through Russia used at the start of World War II for mail which could not travel through India is well-known¹. The route through Kushka in 1935/36 is less well-known but has been written about². However it seems that there was yet another 'Northern Route' which doesn't appear to have been recorded before – through Termez in 1934.

I have only three covers routed that way – all leaving Mazar on the same day: 7/8th March, 1934; all sent to Messrs Aminoff in London; and all clearly 'commercial'.

Cover 1. Sent from the firm of Tagi Zadeh Askuyi Brothers in Mazare-Sharif. Manuscript route marking on the front in Cyrillic: Termez, Moscow, London. Normal 75 poul foreign letter rate.

MAZAR ۱۲/۱۲/۱۷ = (13)12/12/17 = 8th March 1934, but the Western date is 7th March.

TERMEZ, transit mark of 12th March, 1934. No arrival mark.



¹ For an overview, see the Journal of Russian Philately 105, pp.70-77 (also available on afghanphilately.co.uk).

² See the Journal of Russian Philately 105, pp.4-5 (also available on afghanphilately.co.uk).

The recipients of all three of these covers is the firm of 'M. & D. Aminoff, 57 Upper Thames Street, London'. According to their letterheads, Morad and David Aminoff were 'Direct Importers of Furs, Skins, Oriental Carpets, Rugs, Etc. General Exporters and Commission Agents [with] Agencies in India and throughout Persia'. They continued at the same address into the 1970s.

Cover 2

Another cover to Messrs Aminoff. Manuscript route marking on the front in Cyrillic: Termez, Moscow, London, England. Normal 75 poul foreign letter rate. This time the cover is from Andkhoy and has transit marks of Maimana, Mazar and Termez.

The Western dates on the Andkhoy and Maimana marks are obviously wrong (July and January respectively), but the local Afghan dates – which are in manuscript – seem correct.

UNDKHOI (Andkhoy) ۱۲/۱۱/۱۱ = (13)12/11/11 = 31st January 1934

MAIMANAH (Maimana) ۱۲/۱۱/۲۲ (13)12/11/22 = 11th February 1934

The Mazar and Termez dates are the same as the previous cover:

MAZAR ۱۲/۱۲/۱۷ = (13)12/12/17 = 8th March 1934, but the Western date is 7th March.

TERMEZ, transit mark of 12th March, 1934. No arrival mark.



Although today there is a straight road from Andkhoi east for 125 miles to Mazar, that was not the case in 1934. So the route for this (and the next) cover was to travel 80 miles south to Maimana, from where it would have to cross the desert eastwards to Sherbeghan and thence to Mazar, so giving a total journey of about 250 miles. The extremely poor roads and possibly winter snows account for the long transit time.

Cover 3

The third cover to Messrs Aminoff again has a manuscript route marking on the front in Cyrillic: Termez, Moscow (London). Normal 75 poul foreign letter rate. Again from Andkhoi and with transit marks of Maimana, Mazar and Termez.

The Western dates on the Andkhoi and Maimana marks are wrong (still July and January respectively), but the local Afghan dates – which are in manuscript – seem correct.

UNDKHOI (Andkhoi) ۱۲/۱۱/۲۱ = (13)12/11/21 = 10th February 1934

MAIMANAH (Maimana) ۱۲/۱۱/۲۷ or ۸ (13)12/11/27 or 28 = 16th or 17th February 1934

The Mazar and Termez dates are the same as the previous cover:

MAZAR ۱۲/۱۲/۱۷ = (13)12/12/17 = 8th March 1934, but the Western date is 7th March.

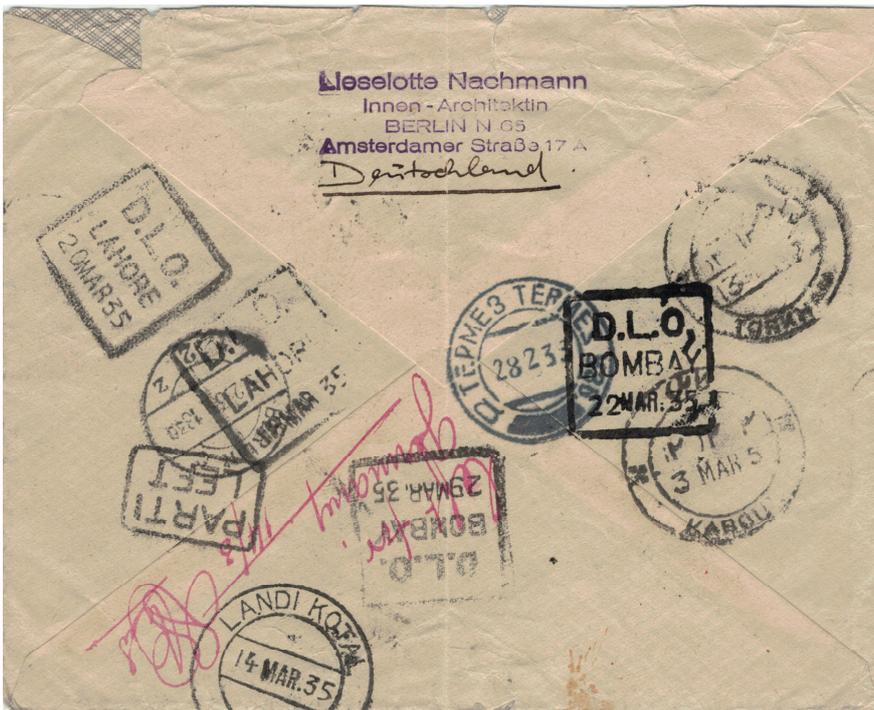
TERMEZ, transit mark of 12th March, 1934. No arrival mark.

So despite leaving Andkhoi 10 days later than the previous cover, it reached Mazar on the same date.



The only other cover to travel this route is going in the opposite direction a year later in February 1935. My thanks again to Thomas Løbbering for the scans:

Cover 4



Again it appears to be a 'commercial' cover, sent to a German teacher at the Royal Art School 'Königl. Kunstschule' in Kabul. The route is: Berlin 15th February, manuscript 'Par avion au delà de Moscou' (by airmail from Moscow) but no Moscow arrival, Termez 28th February, Kabul 3rd March, 1935, with Russian 'airmail' and 'received by air' cachets. And after all that the letter has to be returned to Germany, which it does by the 'usual' route through India. Thomas advise me that to send the cover by rail to Moscow and by Soviet Asian Air Service via Termez to Kabul was cheaper than to use the Imperial Air Services via British India (25+50 RPfg. instead of 25+60 RPfg), which begs the question: why are there not more of these covers around?

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